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9 January 1973

MEMORANDUM FOR: Assistant Deputy Director for Support

THROUGH : Director of Medical Services

SUBJECT : The Upper-Lower Case Case

REFERENCE : Memo from [REDACTED], same subject,
12 December 1972, and your request for
response to same

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1. On the basis of discussions with [REDACTED] of Commo, [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] as well as a quick glance at the literature, the question of whether or not we have a problem yields no ready answer. The literature tends to favor upper-lower. For example, one study found that upper-lower material was read 13% faster and comprehended better than all-upper. How generalizable this finding is and how applicable it might be to Agency situations is unknown. We're going to look at the literature more closely; studies on our own people might be called for at some later point.

2. Assuming no demonstrable advantage to upper-lower, we have no problem. But supposing even a slight advantage is demonstrable, the problem then becomes one of cost effectiveness. To answer it, we need to look at price tags, and this can't be done until much more study is made of possible systems. The factors involved are complex, to say the least. To mention just a few:

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a. [REDACTED] estimates that the normal, projected replacement of commo hardware with upgraded equipment will result in a full capability to go from field origination to headquarters output in upper-lower ten years from now. This suggests little if any additional commo hardware cost.

b. At the headquarters computer end, [REDACTED] sees the conversion cost for printers and programs as very substantial.

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c. If the original input is upper-lower, the time/cost factor is considerable. [REDACTED] has some data showing that keystroke frequency for upper-lower is vastly increased over all-upper.

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d. [REDACTED] suggests a kind of simulated upper-lower input, using a symbol code that would yield true upper-lower output. He suggests further that insertion of such symbol codes might be done automatically. Is this feasible? Opinions vary; nobody knows.

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3. [REDACTED] anticipates negative consumer reaction to all-upper, citing the White House as a case in point. How general is this? Both [REDACTED] have some informal feedback from consumers on this subject; they feel that analysts concerned with the whole content of a document don't care much one way or the other, but acknowledge that librarians insist that upper-lower conveys more information. The subject is of major concern to those (in registry work, reading panels, etc.) who must scan documents to pick out elements for indexing; these people are more apt to feel that all-upper puts them at a disadvantage. If efficiency studies are to be done, they will have to include all types of consumers and address the attitude dimension as well. If indexers are indeed handicapped by all-upper, then the question of how soon most or all indexing will be done automatically becomes relevant.

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4. While [REDACTED] uses different communication channels and hence has problems distinctly different from those of Commo, their interests merge at the point of computer storage and consumer usage. Since they see the need to be ultimately on the same wave length with the rest of the Agency, a move toward upper-lower by other components necessarily effects their long-range planning too.

5. We'd like to give this a little more thought and meet with you in the near future to review where we stand.

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[REDACTED]
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Office of Medical Services

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